

*My Young Days*  
*by*  
*Letitia Greenham Clarke (née Baker)*

*Letitia Greenham Baker (born Rathmines, 1875, died Dublin, 1949) known as “Letty” was one of 11 children of William Hosier Baker (b. Aberdeen, 1844, died Ranelagh, 1911), a bank manager, poet and author, and Letitia Hannah Baker (née Molloy) (b. Abbeyfield, Naas, Co. Kildare, 1852, died Dublin, 1894). Letitia was christened in the Church of Ireland.*

*The following is an edited extract of Letty’s hand-written family history and memoir addressed to her 7 surviving children begun in 1947 when she was 71 and finished June 1948 the year before she died and transcribed by her grandson, Peter J. Clarke. In this section Letty writes about her family life and education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

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Papa and Mamma lived first at Mountpleasant Avenue, Rathgar. I am sure they were very happy. They weren't well off of course but happiness reigned supreme. Papa was very musical and he belonged to St. Patrick's Cathedral until he left Dublin. He was an excellent singer (bass) but I think at first they had no piano as they got it later on from the proceeds of "*Pensiero*" [or, seeing the world : a psychological allegory] a poem he wrote. I was born in Mountpleasant Avenue on September 27<sup>th</sup> 1875. My maiden name was Baker. I don't know when we moved to Frankfort Avenue where we stayed till we left Dublin.

I cannot remember very much about our life in Dublin as I was very young when we went to Kilkenny. But I do remember my brother Barrington being ill for a very long time and being "cupped" by the Doctor. He was very delicate for quite a while but got all right – we went to Kilkenny when I was 6 or 7, Papa going as accountant. He had been a great many years in the Provincial Bank, College Street, sixteen or eighteen. I think my father and mother were very happy in Kilkenny although I think they found it difficult to get a house – I went to a private school at first, I remember a little about it. Then the lady who kept it left and I went to the National School. It is amazing to note that during religious instruction I sat doing a copy in a room all alone! I must have been the only Protestant there. I think Kilkenny was quite a pretty place, one of my few recollections being the walk along the canal, which I loved.

Papa played tennis there and took part in entertainments - he wrote a little sketch called "*The Bluebottle*" which he read himself. My brother Hosier was born in Kilkenny and another poor little thing who was born with something wrong with his trachea, and he couldn't take more than a few drops of liquid at a time, he died about 9 months old.

Papa became Manager of the Provincial Bank of Ireland, 96 Capel Street when I was about 8 I think (about 1883) – we all went to my grandparents house at Abbeyfield, Naas, Co. Kildare, while Papa and Mama got settled in and I remember the day we all arrived to the new house full of excitement and delight in the new house, so much bigger than any we had ever had before.

We were not long there when we all went to school: Barrington to High School, founded 1870, Harcourt Street, and the girls to Miss M'Cutcheon's Rutland School. This was a school

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founded by 4 or 5 sisters daughters of a Longford clergyman. It was a boarding school as well (28 Rutland Square). It remained a School with different Principals till quite recently when it amalgamated with another school. It was a very successful school doing for the North side what the Alexandra School did for the South. "28" is no longer a school: the school proper was advertised for a store, and the boarding house as a private residence.

I loved it very much and was most happy in my progress up from Infant's school to the senior grade. Barrington was never happy at his school which was a pity as he was a clever boy really if they had been sympathetic. We both had piano lessons from a Miss Orpen; and I soon developed a great love for it. I now know that as schools go now it was rather backward: there was no gymnasium or orchestra. Our "drill" was conducted by an old army sergeant, and I am afraid I was a rather troublesome pupil, and as I remember I was turned out of the Class one day! I liked the drill, but it was dull and I would have loved a gymnasium, as I was full of energy when I was not studying or practising piano. When I first went to the Infant's school, I was careless and did not work well. I well remember the first week I took the notion to work and found myself at the head of the class – and indeed head of the Infant's School as I was in the highest class. To this day I remember how my heart beat when I moved up from ever so far down to the top! I never looked back from that moment, (except one year when I was with a teacher I didn't like) and was always top or 2<sup>nd</sup> all through the years. I really loved work and although not wonderful at anything I was good at all my subjects – I made some good friends, and enjoyed my life.

When Miss Orpen got married she recommended my Mother to send me to Dr. Culwick who at that time with Signor Esposito had the teaching of most of music pupils in Dublin. He was a splendid teacher and I think liked teaching me and I made great progress. I practised a great deal, 3 or 4 hours a day. I played Schumann A minor concerto with Dr. Culwick at a school concert: alas! there was no orchestra to play with me. Also the Mendelssohn which was a more difficult piece.

Dr. Culwick was a very clever man; he could not play as a concert player as he had hurt his hand moving a piano and had lost the necessary agility, but he was organist in the Castle Chapel, and ran a society still called the Culwick society [founded 1898], although his daughter who carried it on after his death is also dead. He composed quite a bit but nothing of note.

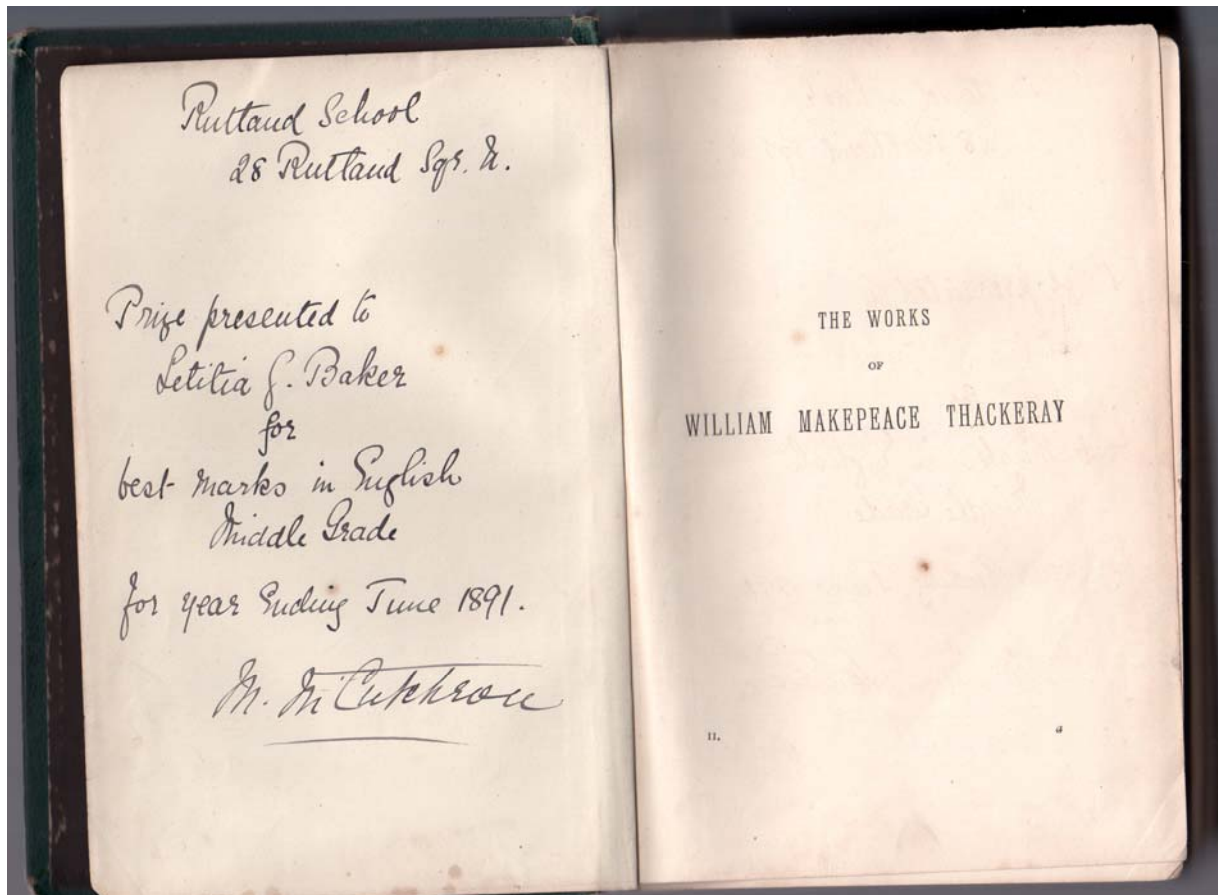
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We had very good teachers at Miss Mac's. Miss Nancy M'C was my favourite – she was a B.A. an unusual thing in those days, and had a pretty sarcastic tongue: but I thought her marvellous. I think London was the first University to admit women. When I started my cut off University career Trinity was not open to women and I had to go to the Royal University. May Stuart however later became M.A. of Trinity not long after.

Mr. Dilworth taught mathematics and I liked him very much, he was quite a big noise in T.C.D. Then Dr. Annie Patterson [one of the founders of the Feis Ceoil in 1896] taught us theory of music, she was of course a great person in her day, she was sweet and gentle and though very plain her kind smile transformed her face and we all loved her. We had Monsieur Cadic for French; he was much thought of in Dublin (though not by his pupils!) and there is a very nice monument to him in Glasnevin. We had other teachers too, but these were the highlights.

I was very lucky and successful in the Intermediate getting a £20 exhibition tenable for 3 years in the year 1890 when I was under 15, a year too young. I was 4<sup>th</sup> in all Ireland and my people must have been very pleased though we all took it very much for granted. Next year I went in for the Middle Grade when I got a prize but [un]fortunately failed to retain my exhibition. As I had a year to spare I went in again next year and got a £30 exhibition tenable for 2 years; in this I got 6<sup>th</sup> place. I retained it next year and got 9<sup>th</sup> place in Senior Grade and a book prize. So I did well in the Intermediate. That was my school life a most intensely absorbing one which kept me occupied for 5 days a week. At first we had only a half day a week [off] but when we were in Junior Grade a whole holiday was granted on Saturday after evening or on Sunday, except practising [singing and piano]. I think that was the secret of my success, as it gave me time for exercise and rested my brain.

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One of Letitia's many book prizes at Rutland School

From the time I was fourteen I really did work hard getting up at 6, and often going on till 11, but of course 9.30 to 3 I was in school and then 3 hours practice and at least an hour for dinner and tea. We had a great many subjects to get through, although we hadn't Irish to do. In the Junior Grade I did Latin, English (comprising all the branches), history, geography, French, Arithmetic, Algebra (these were 3 separate subjects), Botany, Theory of Music (a practical exam was not then in vogue), Drawing and a curious subject called Domestic Economy, chiefly taken up because it was easy and helped the marks. As each teacher considered their subject the most important, one had to work hard to all the exercises, sums etc. that had to be done and I did not like my drawing mistress, and I was very bad in her class. I got a report once that my instruments were a set square and a penny! (for circles). However I got honours in it, which brought me up to my high place, as my teacher took care to point out. As you will see my feelings got the better of me occasionally, but fortunately I liked most of my teachers and worked well for them.

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All this time the home life went on, Gerty, Arthur (twins) and Sybil were born in 96 Capel Street. A darling little baby was born about 1891 I think but only lived a month. I was greatly grieved about this.

My father was a wonderful man for excursions. In those days we only had extremely slow horse-trams; two horses and occasionally a third would help up some particularly steep bridge. We of course thought it wonderful to get a tram run, and we were always delighted when Papa would decide we were to go to Clontarf – a 4d ride. It really was lovely on the Bull Wall and Strand, and well worth a visit. In May we would generally decide on a trip to Howth, Sunday of course. We would each bring our package of sandwiches and wet our whistle at a stream on the way. We used to get out of the train at Sutton and walk right round the Head into Howth and take the train home to the Bank House.

I have never forgotten the beauty of that walk, the sea, the cliffs, the cowslips and blue-bells. Then on a bank holiday we would sometimes take the train to Rathfarnham, and climb a mountain, very often the Hell Fire Club mountain - Mount Pelier. One great day my father, Barrington and I went for a wonderful walk. We got out at Rathfarnham and climbed 2 mountains, and finished up in Bray - Papa said it was 20 miles. When I got out of the train I could hardly walk. A favourite family walk was round the Furry Glen in the park, out to Ashtown Gate and home by the canal; no walk to me was complete without water in it! On wet days Papa brought us to the Museum and the National Gallery, which all was a great help to our education and health.

We always had a month at the sea-side, usually July. At first we went to Skerries, I don't remember very much about it, though I have a diary about one visit we made. Our first holidays [where we lived] in Dublin were spent in a farm house in the Wicklow Hills near Bray called Ballinagee. I remember it faintly and loved it. Then we went to Howth for a couple of years before going to Skerries.

Then we went to Laytown which I always loved. Fifty years ago it was a very primitive place. There was no road except just at the village. Our luggage was carted on the strand to our house, and we walked along the grass edge, all hills and hollows. The village was a sleepy little place with one shop and a hotel; we did most of our shopping in Drogheda.

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Bread carts came round every day, and Oh! I wish you could see the wonderful barm bracks we could get 6 pence or a shilling. I don't think they know how to make them any more.

It was of course very quiet there, just walking and bathing, an occasional pic-nic across the river and an odd day in Drogheda, a visit to the obelisk erected 1736 to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1690 and a walk along the Boyne, tennis on the strand when the balls ran dreadfully and the small children fielded till they stuck and wouldn't do any more. Looking back now I cannot see how we enjoyed it so much, yet the years when I was 16, 17 and 18 when usually a girl wants some fun I can never remember being bored. Whether they all liked it as well I don't know, but I know when the day came to go home we were all very sorry.

Barrington and I were very lucky to have Ballytore, Co. Kildare to go to in August. Uncle Willie and Aunt Anna Cutler lived there and their children Astrea (6 months younger than I) and Neb 5 years younger than Astrea. The house was rather like Hollywell, [Carrick-on-Shannon] but of course hadn't the view, only grass and lovely trees. We used to make hay and bind corn and generally take part in farm work; I was very fond of Uncle Willie and regarded him as one of the most wonderful people I knew. This made a lovely break in the summer and we went back with renewed vigour to work. At Easter Barrington, I, and Astrea and Neb went for years to Abbeyfield and loved it. I loved it so much that I have never forgotten it, and the name Abbeyfield still gives me a thrill. It was so different from Capel Street our home in the heart of the city, and I think I was really meant to live in the country, though I loved Dublin too. I suppose I just lived life as it came, work and play.

The first break in the family routine was when Barrington entered the Bank at about 17½. This meant of course that he had his holidays by himself and was not available for sea, Ballytore or Abbeyfield. He went into 96 College Green branch where he remained for a number of years.

The routine was also changed when Papa, Mama and we all went to Bangor, N. Wales for the month of July. I have written a diary about it, telling of our wonderful achievement in walking from Llanberis Station, climbing Snowdon and walking back again. Now people do that by bus and train up the mountain; it sounds terrible! Papa and Mamma, and the elder ones went also to Bundoran in 1894 – a most disastrous business.

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Mama had never been really strong since my birth. Her wonderful courage and determination kept her up to the mark, and she did things that most women would quake at today. A Bank Manager's salary in those days was small, and we were 8 in family – she had to make clothes for us all, and I can see her now as she was when I came home from school sitting at the machine sewing, sewing away. I am afraid I did not realise how ill she was; no one told me and I was wrapped up in my work, my music and my friends when I had time for them. She was a really wonderful woman and ruled us all by her gentleness and goodness. She never punished us and yet we were all obedient and good. Hosier was troublesome at times and Papa used to get very angry but she always intervened. Papa was really fond of us all and used to love to bring us out, and see us all round him in the evening doing our homework. After I left home I am afraid he lost interest but it was hard for him to lose his wife and then his daughter who suited him so well.

Mamma kept on going out for walks and expeditions and she did the Snowdon trip two years before she died. Looking back now I feel how dreadful it was that nothing was done for her; but then there was only one thing to do and that was to go to Switzerland: I believe Grandfather offered to send her but she said it would kill her to be away from “Bill” and the children, and she would rather stay and die at home.

The trip to Bundoran was made for her health and the advice of a man who said the air was wonderful! But it was perpetually stormy, and I can remember poor Mamma struggling round the cliffs on Papa's arm scarcely able to breath. It did her more harm than good.

Previous to this I had finished my school career doing Senior Intermediate in June 1893. Miss M'Cutcheon made me an offer to take the preparatory grade class (about 24 pupils!) in return for Matric. instructions. Looking back on it, it was a very cheap do for her as I worked very hard. I was only 18 and my pupils were 12 or 13. Of course I really was a born teacher and it came easily enough to me. I taught them everything but Arithmetic and they had a Bible Class from a clergyman. I was so keen on it I made them come in at 9.30 twice a week (school hours were 10 to 3) to do Roman History and they came most of them! I loved that class and remember 5 or 6 of my pupils with great affection to this day. But it was a big strain and my chum Eileen Dunne said I aged years in that one year.



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I got my Matric all right and then I thought I'd like to go to Alexandra College, founded 1866 to finish my B.A. course. In Rutland School I was the one exhibitioner there – in Alexandra every girl almost in a big class with me was an exhibitioner, prize winner or gold medallist and I felt that I was nothing much after all. I was there for 3 months and loved every minute of it. I used to walk over from Capel Street and to this day a November morning with the sun trying to break through fog makes me think of Alexandra College.

The Christmas holidays came, that were to change the whole course of my life. Gone for ever for me were Greek, Latin, German, B.A. exams, and to begin for me my domestic career from Xmas 1894 to the present day in June 1948. My mother seemed very poorly and she made me get the balance of some presents Aunt Anna wanted her to get. At last a day came a week before Xmas when she did not get up. Grandmother came up from Naas and we got a nurse and of course Doctors, but it was the end – she died on 21<sup>st</sup> December, and was buried on our fatal Xmas Eve.

She was conscious to the very last, she waved to us and her head sank (she died in her chair, she had insisted on getting into it from her bed and they didn't like to change her back). She was dead after only 21 years of married life. She had had 11 children, 3 of whom died in childhood, and was a most loving wife and mother. Grandmother and Grandfather's grief was terrible, out of their children they only had one left, and this dead daughter was I think their most dearly loved child: certainly she was Grandmother's. It was so hard to lose so many. We children were in terrible grief; it seemed as if the end of the world had come. I of course gave up at once all thought of continuing my studies, my duty was to my father and the poor young children, Sybil was only 8 and there was no question of anything else. I had already taken up a few duties for poor Mamma and the children were very fond of me and thought all I said and did was just right! Fortunately this was so as I just took my place as mistress of the house without any trouble.

Grandmother of course was a great help as usual forgetting her own deep grief for our need. And so began a new life for me. Miss Nancy M'Cutcheon taught me the sewing machine – I had 9 people to mend for and some making too and I learnt to shop, buy meat and vegetables and arrange meals for each day. I kept on my music, and practised as much as I could get time for. I also went to the R.I.A.M. - Royal Irish Academy of Music, founded 1848, to get

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singing lessons. My teacher was Miss Barnewell: I enjoyed my lessons very much. After 6 months or so I got a prize for exercise singing.

I played Hockey out at Beechfield, Clontarf. I was very enthusiastic and we formed a woman's team and we played several matches. Papa and I joined the Clontarf tennis club in 1896, and played a good deal.

Harold R. White became organist of St. Mary's in Mary Street our parish church about this time. He was very interesting and good looking, very young and married. He started a choral society and Papa and I joined. Miss Barnewell would not let me sing in it, as being bad when I was being trained!! (How H.R.W. laughed at this.) But I offered to play the piano and did so till the society dissolved in the Spring of 1897. It was a most delightful experience and taught me a lot about vocal music. I played solos, and sang at the Concerts that were given and Papa sang some of his finest songs also. I also kept a soft spot in my heart for H.R.W. and met him occasionally all through the years.

We had quite a bit of fun and dancing. Barrington being my great companion. We went about a great deal together, to the theatre, on walks and to dances, we were always most companionable.

Well now I come to the most important event of my life, my meeting with your Daddy. As usual we went down to Laytown July 1895. I was still in mourning for my mother, but we were beginning to do more things and enjoy ourselves a bit. Your Daddy's father, Eugene Clarke, and mother, Frances M.J. Clarke, neé O'Neill, always went to Laytown for the summer taking a very nice house, near the terrace we were on (called Mrs. Murphy's Houses).

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*Letty's father, William Hosier Baker, decided to occupy himself after his wife's death by brushing up his French. On 6<sup>th</sup> November 1900 at St. Mary's, Dublin, he married his French teacher, Marie Blanche Alexandrine Rullier (born Rochefort, Charente, France, 1874) and had 4 more children with her making a total of 15 in all. He died 20 June 1911.*

*Letty's brother Barrington became a bank manager in Omagh, Co. Tyrone. He was also a book collector, and honorary secretary of the National Literary Society, Dublin (from which the Abbey Theatre developed). He was a friend of Yeats, Synge and Æ. The Theatre Collection at Belfast Central Library is based on material he collected.*

*Letty's cousin Astrea Cutler, b. Co. Kildare, 1876, trained as a midwife at the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin and opened the first maternity nursing home known as Denmark House. Astrea never married and was buried in a community grave at Mount Jerome, Dublin in 1957.*

*At 21 Letty married a civil engineer from Drogheda, Eugene O'Neill Clarke, on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1897 in the sacristy at St. Mary's R.C. Church, Athlone, celebrant Rev. Canon Gilligan, P.P. Carrick-on-Shannon. She became a Catholic shortly afterwards. Eugene became County Surveyor for Leitrim and they lived at Hollywell, Carrick-on-Shannon and had 9 children, 2 of whom died young. She died in Dublin on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1949.*



The McCann Memorial Monument  
Carrick-on-Shannon designed by  
Eugene O'Neill Clarke,  
County Surveyor

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Letitia Greenham Clarke (née Baker) &  
Eugene O'Neill Clarke  
Summer, 1934